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“¿Cual Es Tu Sueño Americano?”:

The Shifting Latinx Perception of Opportunity in Miami Since 1980

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Abstract

The 1980 Mariel Boatlift threatened the "Golden Exiles" narrative, igniting established White Cubans to seize control and become the dominant ethnic group in Miami. Since then, White Cubans have maintained and upheld a hegemonic presence and redefined opportunity, success, and the American Dream within the city. With the influx of Latin American immigrant groups, the "Cuban American Dream" restricts other Latin Americans from achieving their opportunities unless it meets Cuban standards, raising the following question: Who is left out from the American Dream? This essay examines how opportunity for Latin American groups in Miami and its changes over the decades since 1980 through the lens of the American Dream based on interviews, newspaper articles, demographic data, and U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

Keywords: Miami, South Florida, American Dream, Latinx Studies, Immigration

Is Miami the “land of opportunity”? A “paradise lost”? A “sophisticated tropic” or a “banana republic”? Is it the “city of the future” or a “city on the edge”? Is Miami America’s Riviera or America’s Pretoria? Miami is all of these things – a composite of images that overlap and intersect, compete, and collide (Croucher 1997).

For the past few decades, Miami can be described as a city filled with curiosities and dichotomies. The city's transformation from a quiet, tourist spot to a bustling economic center is partly due to the influx of immigrants, primarily from Latin America, during the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries.¹ Beginning with Cuban exiles in the 1960s, Latin American immigrant waves shifted the city's demographics away from White Anglo dominance and evolving from an ethnic minority to an ethnic majority.²

Some immigrants viewed Miami as an escape from an oppressive government – a beacon of hope and opportunity to follow the American Dream. Conflicts between “established” and “new” immigrants heightened the city's complex inter- and intraethnic relations. Latin American immigrants clash with one another as they each attempt to forge their own path of success and opportunity. Competition ensues between the established White Cubans and the newly settled Latin Americans as the former centralizes power, opportunity, and success within their community. The mythology behind the American Dream permeates Miami's immigrant narratives and draws attention to its intersection of race, class, and ethnicity. Beyond the city's sandy beaches and glistening waters, Miami's unique character was, and continues to be, shaped by the crucible of immigration.³

Perceiving Miami in the Twentieth Century

In 1979, Ecuador's President Jaime Roldòs Aguilera nicknamed Miami the "capital of Latin America." While the moniker may have been a slight exaggeration, Roldòs Aguilera prophesized Miami's urban and economic transformation. By 1985, Miami operated as a middleman between the U.S. and Europe with access to market goods and resources from Latin

America: “If Miami were an independent nation, its gross national product ... would total some \$23.5 billion, about the same as that of Chile” (Levine 1985).⁴

Described as “tourist resort for wealthy families from the Northeast,” Miami was founded in July 1896 after Julia Tuttle convinced industrialist Henry Flagler to visit South Florida, sending him a bouquet of orange blossoms to prove the region was “frost free” (Portes and Stepick 1994; Grosfoguel 2003). Although apocryphal, Tuttle secured the city’s founding as Flagler arrived and promoted the city by establishing a newspaper – *Miami Metropolis* (Mohl 1989). While Miami was not a metropolis yet in the early twentieth century, the city attracted 11,000 permanent citizens and about 125,000 annual tourists, including Carl Fisher and George Merrick – later developers of Miami Beach and Coral Gables (Mohl 1989; Portes and Stepick 1994). All eyes were on the “Magic City” as White industrialists built the neighborhoods and roads of a new, bustling city.

Media outlets and notable figures continuously shaped Miami’s image by addressing it by new nicknames: “Paradise Regained” and Al Capone’s “Garden of America” in *Fortune* magazine (1936). The city’s allure persisted in the 1940s and 1950s as the introduction of air-conditioning, according to Alberto Ibarguen, expanded Miami’s opportunity from being a seasonal paradise to a paradise all year long (Portes and Armony 2018). However, the city’s charm, enjoyed by White elites, dimmed as the emergence of non-White ethnic immigrant enclaves tarnished the façade of escape, with Miami being referred to as a “Paradise Lost” and a “Third-World Country”(Arranda, Chang, and Sabogal 2009). The changes in nicknames exemplify the growing perceptual conflict within Miami as both a city of distractions filled with

glamor and glitz and a city of reality filled with racial and ethnic pressures and tensions, reflecting a push-and-pull in praise and criticism over the city.

Defining Dreams Under the Sun

Miami's scholarship, however, has been primarily limited to studying the Cuban immigration waves and their political, cultural, and economic effects on the city. On a broader scale, scholarship in ethnic history and urban studies has primarily been focused on cities like Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago. Miami's limited academic interest overlooks the city's complex, dichotomic interethnic and intraethnic dynamics in a city that has popularly been viewed as a luxury vacation spot. Some scholars omit the intersecting and multifaceted dynamics existing with the city by approaching the "capital of Latin America" from a singular lens of nationality and omit an unusual case study where an ethnic minority gained and continues to maintain control over a major metropolitan city.

Scholars in various fields, from sociology to urban studies to cultural history, have been fascinated with the oddities of the Cuban stories in Miami since their earliest mass arrival in the 1950s. Compared to the other nationalities and ethnic groups in the city, Cubans went through a "relatively smooth" assimilation that eased their transition into the U.S., uniting under a common "exile identity and ideology" (Croucher 1997; Grenier 2006).⁵ Fulgencio Batista's overthrow in 1959 triggered a mass exodus that had ramification on the U.S., and subsequently Miami's, political, economic, and cultural landscape (García 1996; Croucher 1997). The Cuban plight symbolized an escape from Fidel Castro's communist government, becoming a focal point for scholars attempting to understand their liminal identity between Cuba and the U.S.

Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick (1994) highlight the strangeness behind Miami's ethnoracial power dynamics." They highlight the city's transformation from a White Anglo-dominated city in the early twentieth century to a Latin-dominated city. Utilizing newspaper articles, interviews, and statistical data, Portes and Stepick demonstrate the ethnoracial tensions in Miami between the White, Black, and Latinx communities, specifically Cubans, and the conflict between them as they competed for the opportunity. They underscore how ethnic groups struggled to gain and maintain power within the city because of conflicting interests and the group dominance, creating an ethnoracial hierarchy within Miami.

Portes and Stepick's overarching question of "who rules Miami [in 1994]?" is left in limbo as they point out the different ebbs and flows of ethnoracial tensions within the city. While one group pushes for power and the other struggles, they are all caught in a tug-of-war battle to determine who has the upper hand. Although Portes and Stepick leave the question open-ended, they suggest that Cubans may play an even more significant role in the city's transformation, shifting the question from "who rules?" to "why do they rule?"⁶

Since 1994, other Latin American immigrants were finding themselves fleeing socialist and communist government to the U.S. to establish opportunity and chase the American Dream. White Cubans replaced non-Latin White dominance after 1980 by populating political its adjacent sectors in Miami in response to Cuban migration changes and a reinforced finality in their stay. The emergence of newly arrived Latin Americans added to the pre-existing ethnic and racial tension within the city as established White Cuban communities was forced to make room for other Latin Americans. While both groups followed similar immigration patterns, the newly arrived Latin Americans were forced to deal with an existing White Cuban establishment

that pushes for their success and opportunity while marginalizing the outliers. Newly arrived Latin Americans would begin to feel comparable ethnic and racial tensions as they attempt to establish reestablish themselves in a city filled with competing groups.

Miami's ethnic and racial makeup has expanded beyond a tri-ethnic analysis (Portes and Stepick, 1994; Croucher, 1997; Croucher, 2002).⁷ The tri-ethnic landscape oversimplifies the complexities behind ethnic and racial identities by fitting them into contrived categories. It fails to consider the subjectivity and multifaceted of racial and ethnic identity markers which in turn contributes to tension within communities. For example, Afro-Latinx people exist in two categories according to the tri-ethnic approach: Black and Latinx; yet they are racialized differently by both groups because of markers like national origin, skin color, dialect, and/or language.⁸ To understand Miami's evolving interethnic and intraethnic relations, it is crucial to reexamine how ethnic and racial groups are classified and how those classifications unveil conflicts. Increased Latin American immigration to the city raises Portes and Stepick's question again about who rules and who is left out. However, the question must be reimagined in thinking about interethnic tension and how dominance by one can infringe on the opportunities of others.⁹

Understanding U.S. immigrant opportunity can be facilitated by studying how a national ethos, like the American Dream, contributes to a mythological illusion pulling migration waves. The American Dream is described as the "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (Adams 1931). It stems from a patriotic need to define a communal ideology that can be shared amongst Americans to achieve their "pursuit of happiness." The need to form a unifying

ideology and myth is based on elevating American exceptionalism in contrast to other countries across the world, especially those that fail to meet the criteria of democracy, freedom, and opportunity. A heterogeneous society, like the U.S., depends on ideological unity to holding the country together in its search for shared internal values.

Wendy Wall draws connections between four similar, yet distinct ideologies rooted in American exceptionalism: the American Dream, American Way, American Creed, and American Character (2009). Although different in name, these concepts emerge from a need to define, create, and unite under Americanism. Wall presents all four ideologies by discussing their connections to capitalism, democracy, and anti-communist stances to contextualize and establish synonyms for Americanism (2009). It was and continues to be critical for the U.S. to espouse Americanism internationally to both enemies and allies to create an image of unity for the rest of the world. The criteria, however, changed with every decade as an understanding of "what is America?" changed as Americans "[worked] assiduously to shape the answer" (Wall 2009).

Although Wall's examination of the effects and symptoms of Americanism is limited to the early to mid-twentieth century, the ideas of communal ideology and patriotism continue to be applicable post-Civil Rights era, especially with the influx of immigrant groups to the U.S. Wall (2009) additionally cites notable examples of how the U.S. implemented programs that espoused American exceptionalism during the early Cold War, including the "Letters to Italy" campaign. (Wall 2009) To shift public sentiment against communism, the U.S. relied on first and second-generation citizens to speak on the country's "democratic" values, developing rhetoric centered on American exceptionalism. It allowed new generations to be included in the

country's definition of an "American" by involving new people who may otherwise have not viewed themselves as American. Latin Americans in pursuit of the American Dream offers them the opportunity to be staunch proponents of the U.S. values in their communities, both domestically and internationally, and elevating the country's status as the land of opportunity and success. The U.S., in turn, is mythologized as a "promise land" for immigrants in hopes they can work hard and build themselves up, like Horatio Alger and Andrew Carnegie, and embrace values of economic success – a value that captivated the hearts and desires of Cuban exiles (Cullen 2003; Grenier 2006).

1980 Mariel Boatlift "Crisis"

In April 1980, Miguel Ordoqui requested an exit visa to leave Cuba when the government opened the Port of Mariel for emigration. He obtained a permit to leave for the U.S. and waited for the government's signal. After a night out, police officer knocked on his door, ordered him to be ready, and he hopped onto a bus where he arrived at a dock with a yacht waiting to leave for the U.S; emotion overcame Miguel as he saw Key West in the distance and pictured a new future for himself: "I felt free and realized what freedom tasted like; that's what I felt." Miguel became one of the thousands of migrants who came to Miami searching for the American Dream during an immigration wave that shaped the city: the 1980 Mariel Boatlift (Ordoqui 2018).

"[Those] who [have] no revolutionary genes, [those] who have no revolutionary blood...we do not want them, we do not need them," Castro declared to millions of Cubans at the *Plaza de la Revoluciòn* during a May Day celebration in 1980 (Castro 1980). His speech was

met with applause and cheers as the audience chanted his name in support of the decision to expel *los gusanos* from their homeland.¹¹ The reversal of Cuba's restrictive emigration policy opened the doors for 124,776 Marielitos to immigrate to the U.S. between April and September 1980 (García 1996).¹²

The boatlift emerged socio-cultural tensions between the Cuban exile community abroad and the homeland. Emigrating after 1959, the Cuban community abroad believed their exile to be temporary and held on to the possibility of returning to Cuba one day (García 1996). Castro denounced the exile community and encouraged traitors to leave the country. A tug-of-war battle ensued between the U.S. and Cuba, symbolizing the clash between democracy and communism.

Tensions, however, between the exiles and Cuba had lessened since the Ford administration. To gain popular and diplomatic support abroad, Castro invited the exile community in 1978 to a dialogue on issues affecting the Cuban community. Although initially accepted to open communication, the dialogue created further divisions within the exile community as questions were raised as to whether collaboration was possible with a government that imprisoned and executed so many compatriots from home (García 1996).

Nevertheless, the dialogue eased travel restrictions between Cuba and the U.S. The Cuban government released political prisoners and exiles had the opportunity to visit home for the first time since emigrating. The back-and-forth travel between the countries allowed Cubans who lived in the homeland to see what kind of life the exiles lived in the U.S. Exposure

to luxury and new ideas ignited fires inside Cubans who desired to leave the island – a fire that sparked two years later at the Peruvian Embassy (García 1996).

On April 1, 1980, a Cuban bus driver crashed his minibus through the Peruvian Embassy in Havana. The driver's attempt to gain political asylum killed a Cuban guard, forcing Castro to withdraw and protect his guards from the embassy. Free from police protection, approximately 10,800 men, women, and children crowded the embassy within forty-eight hours in hopes of finding refuge (Portes and Stepick 1994). The Peruvian Embassy's encampment received

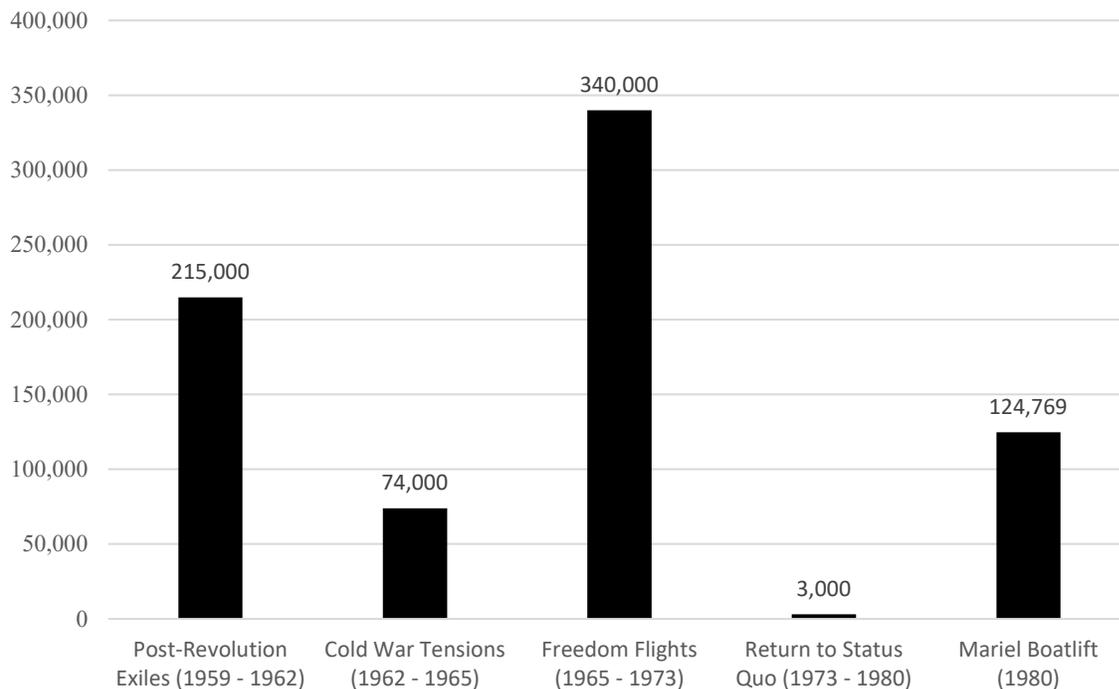


Figure 1. Waves of Cuban Immigration to the U.S. from 1959 to 1980.

Source: Alejandro Portes and Robert L. Bach. *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the U.S.*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 85.

international attention as Cuban exiles rallied in support of their compatriots, urging the U.S. to intervene. Cuba, the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Andean Pact negotiated an emigration plan set in motion for April 16. Across the U.S., 124,776 marielitos

settled in cities far away from Cuba, with over 50 percent of them settling in South Florida (Camayd Freixas 1988; Portes and Stepick 1994; García 1996).

Before 1980, the U.S. had only experienced two other significant waves of Cuban migration (Figure 1). The Post-Revolution exiles were comprised of political leaders tied to Fulgencio Batista's government and Cubans affected by Castro's social and economic reform. The "Freedom Flights" was an airborne operation between Cuba and the U.S. that allowed dissenting Cubans to leave the island. These earlier waves of Cuban migrations were characterized by a higher socioeconomic class and lighter skin. In contrast, Mariel exiles were typically darker skin and from working or lower-class backgrounds. They lacked the same privileges and opportunities that earlier waves of Cuban immigration had when they fled to the U.S. (Portes and Bach 1985; García 1996; Croucher 1997).

White Cubans viewed marielitos as a threat to the Cuban image – an image crafted based characteristics that made them worthy of being American. Although both groups pursued opportunity and the American Dream, established White Cubans had been in the U.S. longer and reaped the benefits of stability and positive media representation. On the other hand, marielitos were forced to deal with the backlash against them for following similar desires. One Cuban American official in 1983 commented on the effects of Mariel: "Mariel destroyed the image of Cubans in the U.S. and, in passing, destroyed the image of Miami itself for tourism" (Portes and Stepick, 1994). The public official prioritizes the Cuban image and exemplifies the fears and anxiety that lie in changing perception and losing status. For some Cubans, their hold over their image was their only way to maintain and hold onto the American Dream they crafted within the U.S.

The Miami Herald launched a series of anti-Cuban campaigns where they criticized the city's massive Cuban influx, believing they were being taken over. The newspaper represented the "voice of the Anglo establishment," and their fears were rooted in concerns over the city's economic position and threats to the power establishment (Portes and Stepick 1994). News stories, editorials, and letters to the editors were centered on preventing any future waves of immigration, and, in turn, discredit the Cuban community. (Portes and Stepick 1994). A study of the *Miami Herald* found that the boatlift's negative coverage reached 90 percent and remained steadily between 40 and 60 percent after (Clark, Lasaga, and Reque 1981; Camayd Freixas 1988; Portes and Stepick 1994). Local anti-Cuban sentiment corroborated with a larger national narrative in the 1980s centered on nativism and immigration control. Richard Lamm, a former Colorado governor, warned of the danger behind unassimilating immigration by citing Miami as an example of how they can "change America" (Gonzalez 2011).

To differentiate themselves from the *marielitos*, the established White Cuban community banded together to take the opportunities presented to them and push forward in hopes of breaking through the "Anglo establishment." They pushed to reinvent the narrative imposed by *The Miami Herald* by joining local politics and, slowly but surely, taking the reins of power within the city. The White Cuban community capitalized on their "model minority" status to help remind both the city and the country that they are still a product of the American Dream as the "Golden Exiles." Luis Botifoll, a leading Cuban American banker, embodied this belief by stating that "it is no exaggeration to say that the motor of [Miami's] Great Change was the Cuban men and women who elected freedom and came to the shores to rebuild their homes and face with courage an uncertain future." (Botifoll, 1988; Portes and Stepick, 1994)

The darker-skinned Mariel exiles pushed White Cubans to set a new course for them in the 1980s, where they overtook the non-Latin Whites to retain their dream and image. By becoming the establishment, they standardized what it meant to be a Cuban, or rather a Cuban American, and the possibilities for Latin Americans in Miami. The newly arrived Cubans complicated the American Dream narrative of White Cubans who needed to control their status by creating a distinction between them and darker-skinned Cubans. White Cubans longer were comfortable with being the minority, but instead, they pushed to become a majority in the 1990s.

(White) Cubans, the New Colonizers?

In May 1986, Dolores Prida's one-act play, *Coser y Cantar*, was slated to be performed in a three-bill showing but was forced to cancel after intense scrutiny and violence by Cuban exiles in Miami. They denounced Prida for her participation in Castro's dialogues and her belief in normalizing relations with Cuba, arguing her political sympathies aligned with communism. Prida, a New York-based Cuban American playwright, denied all accusations of communist sympathies and retaliated in a *New York Times* articles: "I'm one of the top Hispanic playwrights in this country, and that recognition is everywhere except Miami." Nation-wide recognition was no use to the Cuban opinion that decried her as an "enemy of the Cuban exiles." She was an outsider exposed to Miami politics, where anti-communist Cuban sentiment permeated the city's culture. Although Prida identified as a Cuban American, her perceived political affiliations with Castro overpowered any potential camaraderie amongst Cubans. A Cuban businessman held up his position by defending the criticism:

When so many persons have been affected by communism, when so many had to abandon the land they were born, when people could not visit the cemeteries where their loved one's rest, we do have to protect this kind of thing. Why not? Why do they have to impose on such a painful thing? A person who has not suffered, who has not had relatives killed, can say coolly that there must be a freedom of expression. We know better. It is too hard that they come here, to our center, to tell us these things. (Portes and Stepick 1994)

Established Cubans created a strict political binary in Miami that dictated what was permissible in the Cuban-dominated city. Anti-communist atmosphere prevailed in Miami and prompted Americas Watch to release a report in 1992, entitled "Dangerous Dialogue: Attacks on Freedom of Expression in Miami's Cuban Exile Community" (Croucher 2002). Some Cubans perceived communist sympathies to infringe on their opportunities and standards, or rather their "Cuban American Dream."

The White Cuban community's attempts to reimagine Cuba for themselves in Miami was based on expelling any remnants or legacies of the ideologies that pushed them out of Cuba in the first place. Alongside an anti-communist stance, another tenet of the Cubanized American Dream is the pursuit of capitalistic success. For many Cubans, success is synonymous with opportunity and freedom. José Caballero captures this sentiment by stating that "freedom has a price": for him, it was letting go of Cuba in pursuit of freedom in the U.S. where they can go change careers, open a business, and become wealthy based on their own will (Cabellero 2018). Alongside the abstraction of success and opportunity, racial perceptions play into the American

Dream by feeding into a larger question about who fits into the narrative. Arguably, the Cuban American Dream is also centered on its proximity to Whiteness, or at least the U.S. racial construction of it. Subsequent immigrant groups, including the Mariel exiles, must adhere to these tenets or be marginalized in Miami. Ultimately, their perception of opportunity maintains its strength in Miami, pushing and imposing on other groups to assimilate and follow similar paths.

Before the first Cuban immigration wave in 1959, Miami neared 500,000 residents, with about 83% constituted as "White, non-Hispanic" while "Hispanic" only made up about 4% of the population (Portes and Stepick 1994).¹³ Between 1950 and 1980, during the significant Cuban immigration waves, there was a 1395% increase in the city's Hispanic makeup. As the Hispanic population increased, the "White non-Hispanic" population decreased in an "Anglo Flight" to evade the Cuban takeover. The inverted demographical relationship is exhibited by how enrollment by ethnicity drastically changed in Miami-Dade Public Schools, where Hispanic enrollment increased by 60.4% and "White non-Hispanic" decreased by 42.7% between 1975 and 1988. (Pérez 1990) The massive increase in the overall Hispanic population demonstrates a sizable shift from White to a non-White majority, raising questions on the city's reactions. Cuban exiles constituted 70% of the newly arrived "Hispanic" population, while the remaining 30% was made up of other Latin American immigrant groups, particularly Nicaraguans and Haitians.

Established White Cubans needed to catapult themselves into power within the city to ensure their survival and prevent any more damage to their perceived exceptionalism as the "Golden Exiles."¹⁴ (García 1996) They ousted the previous power, the non-Latin Whites, and set

the city's tone henceforth. Miami's Cubanization dictated the feasibility of opportunity in the city and whether other groups had similar access. They standardized expectations for exiles, mainly from Cuba, and reinforced a push for capitalistic success and anti-communist fervor.

By 1990, the Latin American and Caribbean portion of Miami's population reached 1,061,669. The Cuban population made up over 50% of that number and 49.2% of the city's total population (Arranda, Hughes, and Sabogal 2014). Initially perceived as a "temporary visit," White Cubans needed to find ways to accommodate themselves in a city that was not home and recreate *la Cuba de ayer*. (García 1996; Croucher 1997) As David Rieff in *The New Yorker* explains: "In Miami, Cubans live, or try to live, in *la Cuba de ayer* – the Cuba of yesterday. It is a mythical country we have fabricated, where nostalgia and myths abound." For many of these Cubans, their country was lost to communism, and so reinventing it by taking their culture and traditions enabled them to reimagine a world where they can thrive and succeed. Their American Dream was essentially rooted in reclaiming a past world and solidifying a road for future generations. And thus, opportunity and success are filtered through a Cuban lens that favors their community over the others to help rebuild a quasi-Cuban homeland.

White Cuban success has additionally maintained through their election into high-profile positions and offices that allowed them to push for policies that fit their community's best interest. Since 1996, the winning mayoral candidates for either Miami-Dade County or the City of Miami have been White Cubans. All of the "winners" of the Mayoral elections have been White Cuban men who immigrated to Miami after Batista's fall between 1959 and 1962.¹⁵ The cycle began with Xavier Suarez in 1985 and was followed by Willy Gort as the Mayor of the City of Miami and Alex Penales as the Mayor of Miami-Dade County in 1996.¹⁶ There has been little

(almost no) opposition from other national groups during each election year, even though Miami's first Latino mayor was Puerto Rican-born Maurice Ferré in 1973.¹⁷

In recent years, the established White Cubans' children have followed their parents' footsteps by pursuing the exact positions that their parents ran for before. This phenomenon can be seen with Francis X. Suarez running for Mayor of the City of Miami in 2017 and Raquel Regalado running in 2016 for the Miami-Dade County.¹⁸ Established Cubans have taken hold of a prominent public office and retained a generational strength that deters and deflects other groups from running for public office. In reevaluating the national origins and ethnicity of Miami elected officials in 2010, Cuban or Cuban Americans made up 40.9% of the elected officials while Non-Cuban Hispanics only made up about 4% of the elected officials (Arranda, Hughes, and Sabogal 2014). Even if a candidate from another nationality or race ran for office, the chance of them winning the election was slim because of the Cuban voting bloc. Cubans want to align with Cubans who match their interest and maintain an anti-communist foundation.

Despite *The Miami Herald's* efforts to discredit Cuban success early on, the newspaper had to bend to the Cuban majority by scaling back its malicious attacks and re-introducing its Spanish newspaper in 1987: *El Nuevo Herald*. The shift from attacking to accommodating demonstrates the White Cuban community's influence on Miami, where they were no longer standing on the sidelines. They shaped institutions that had actively worked against them to help themselves and expand their prospect. A Spanish newspaper enabled Spanish-speaking journalists, writers, and thinkers to express their opinion in a common language. For some, the ability to express views that the government did not censor them to pursue authorial

opportunities and frame stories in a model that fit the "Cuban Success Story" as coined by George Gilder in a *Reason* article. In turn, the Cuban Success Story becomes symptom of the American Dream where capitalistic success, anti-communist sentiment, and Whiteness is centered.

A classic rags-to-riches myth was created about Cubans and propagated to showcase the opportunities of the U.S., becoming the blueprint for what is expected and possible. The Cuban Success Story was a tool used by White Cubans to highlight the strength and potentials of capitalism to discredit Cuba and communism. Despite fears, the "Golden Exile" trope did not end with the 1980 Mariel Boatlift Crisis; but instead, the legacy used and left in place by established White Cubans was in ways imposed on the "other" Latin American groups. They were expected to perform and follow similar patterns as the Cubans had done so decades earlier. The pressures of the "Golden Exile" were no longer attributed to only Cubans, but instead, newly arrived Latin Americans immigrants were expected to embody capitalistic success and anti-communist fervor like their predecessors.

By reinventing the American Dream, White Cubans were no longer foreigners within the land and expected to fit into the model of U.S. assimilation. Instead, they were in a city that belonged to them. The "Cuban American Dream" becomes a mixture between Americanism, Cuban nationalism, and anti-communist sentiment. These ideologies work in tandem to create a model for future generations of Latin American immigrants, sustaining the legacy of the "Golden Exile".

The "Other" Latin Americans

"Today, the 6th of December, we Venezuelans have written a new page in our history. The national soul has been reborn," announced Hugo Chávez after winning Venezuela's 1998 presidential elections. He ran on a socialist platform based on anti-poverty, anti-corruption, and most importantly, anti-capitalist. The economic policies enacted, and promised, by Chavez brought about concern amongst upper and middle-class Venezuelans, fearing the changes on the country's horizon. Patricia Andrade, the Venezuelan founder of Raíces Venezolanas, reflected: "I've been living in this country for over 30 years, and once Chavez came to power, I knew something bad was going to happen in Venezuela" (Green 2019).

During the late 1990s, about 150,000 Venezuelans followed the previous U.S. immigrant waves' footsteps and sought refuge in South Florida; however, they were not alone. Latin Americans across the region, predominantly from South America, fled their home countries and settled in the U.S. in hopes of redefining opportunities for themselves. According to Alfonso Chardy's *Miami Herald* article, an estimated 25,000 to 50,000 immigrants from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela settled in South Florida between 1999 and 2000. A senior Clinton administration official said: "[The immigration] is not out of the ordinary given some of the economic and social turmoil that these countries are experiencing" (Chardy 2000).

During the early 2000s, the rise of socialist governments, political turmoil, and economic instability prompted middle and upper-class professionals to resettle and reinvest in a new future. Like the Cuban exodus in the mid-twentieth century, these "new" Latin American immigrant groups began to slowly change Miami's cultural, economic, and political landscape

yet failed to break through the White Cuban establishment.¹⁹ However, Miami was no longer a White Anglo majority, but instead, it was a city dominated by White. The rise in non-Cuban Latin Americans to Miami posed a threat to Cuban dominance as new groups were forced to be included in the city's complex intraethnic and ethnoracial tension. The city was no longer forced to handle one nationality of Latin America but a multitude.

The new, or rather the "other," Latin American groups believed in the opportunities available in the U.S. – opportunities made available under the American Dream mythology. For instance, Jorge, an immigrant from Perú, considers himself an "economic immigrant" where his desire to relocate to the U.S. was primarily to better his living standard (Sabogal 2005).

Peruvian immigration to the U.S. came in three waves, similar to the Cubans, during the 1950s, 1970s, and recently the 1990s when 63% of Peruvian immigrants arrived in the U.S. (Sabogal 2005). Although Jorge explicitly mentions the American Dream, his desire to improve his life was centered on economic opportunity and aligned with the tenets of success associated with the American Dream – a definition explored by Jennifer Hochschild (1995). As a Peruvian, however, Jorge lacks the same type of extensive network that Cubans have after living in the U.S., specifically in Miami, for over 50 years (Sabogal 2005). Together with governmental economic and social support, these networks enable an ease in transition from an immigrant's home country to the U.S. as they can take advantage of the opportunities established for them.

Miguel, a retired Chilean professional, immigrated to Miami in 1980 with his wife in hopes of establishing a family and career in medicine – opportunities that were unattainable for him under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship. He was amazed by the available options within the U.S., claiming that "everyone had a chance for success in this country." Miguel indicated that

the American Dream was possible and real, but it was contingent on whether people had the determination and willingness to pursue it. He described how the city had transformed itself from “an empty lot” to “towers and skyscrapers,” especially with the massive influx of Latin American immigrants helping develop the city (Paredes-Ruíz 2020).²⁰

Although Miguel did not flee a socialist state like other immigrants, he still believed that Chile’s political climate and economic status would hinder him from going further in the medical field. Miguel’s decision to leave the country and settle in Miami demonstrates his desire to improve his standard of living and pursue opportunities under the auspices of American success. New immigrant groups understood the limits of opportunities in their home countries and pursued the American Dream for a chance at a middle-class existence, akin to the White Cubans. Their opportunities, or rather dreams, were rooted in securing success linked with wealth and employment, specifically in the U.S.

The American Dream, an ethos based on mythologized success, has been pursued by groups in the past, such as Cubans, as a way to reject their socialist home countries and embrace democracy. The “Cubanized American Dream” was rooted in anti-communist sentiment, capitalist work ethic, U.S. patriotism, and Whiteness. It is an expected model of success imposed on Latin American immigrants by the U.S. and perpetuated by White Cubans. Latin American immigrants in the late 1990s onward were expected to follow a reimagined national ethos based on the Cuban Success story.

The “new” Latin American immigrants followed similar immigrant patterns as their Cuban predecessors in the 1960s by relocating to South Florida in pursuit of an economic

opportunity that had been taken from their home country. Their assumptions and rejection of socialist or “communist” ideologies aligned with the everlasting effect of Cold War politics that had a firm hold on Miami, specifically Cuban culture. Many of these groups, similar to Cubans, would become staunch anti-communist ambassadors for the U.S. as they bought into the “American Dream” reinforced by the Cubans. Eduardo Gamara, a professor at Florida International University, draws a connection between newly arrived Latin American immigrants from socialist countries and their association with U.S. Republican party politics:

Miami is a very particular place because the immigration that comes here. These are immigrants that come by plane, and a lot of immigrants that come here come from a higher socioeconomic standard. You will see most that most of them back home, they were conservatives that believed in that market and who were obviously against the [socialist] policies so it’s not surprising that they would readily identify with the right. (Green 2019)

By extension, the American Dream is a symptom of Cold War politics embedded into Latin American cultures, specifically Cubans, that is acted upon when they relocate to the U.S. They idealize the nation as a beacon for democracy, and capitalism by default, that they become actors in the “macro” manifested in the “micro”; in this case, the ideological battle against communism was exhibited through the lives of Latin Americans.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported a steady increase in Miami's Cubans from 1990 to 2012. They continued to be many Latinos within the city, with 561,868 in 1990, 650,601 in 2000, and 894,168 in 2012 (Arranda, Highes, and Sabogal 2014). Between 1990 and 2012,

Miami's top nationalities, excluding Cubans, shifted every decade between Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Colombians (Arranda, Highes, and Sabogal 2014).²¹ They maintained a high presence within the city as political and economic shifts in their home countries pushed more people to immigrate to South Florida. Although Cubans hold a majority, the percentage change has been rapidly increasing for other Latin American groups over the decades. For instance, Venezuelans experienced a 122 percent increase, Uruguayans a 251 percent increase, and El Salvadorians a 132 percent increase between 2000 and 2012 compared to Cubans' 39 percent increase (Arranda, Highes, and Sabogal, 2014).

The demographic changes indicate that "new" Latin American groups moved to Miami faster than Cubans, posing a possible future threat to the city's Cuban majority. Before the 2000s, an article by Carlos Harrison in *The Miami Herald* echoed this concern early on by stating: "The political pie keeps growing for Hispanics, and it's getting sliced into more pieces. Cubans still have the biggest piece, but it's shrinking." Suppose different non-Cuban immigrant groups begin to settle in Miami. It can create ripple effect changes within the city that can transform the city from being "Cubanized" to being "Latinized," encompassing more nationalities versus one. The expansion of the "pie," as Harrison put it, opens up the opportunity and breaks through the model that places pressure on Latin American immigrants to assimilate and perform as the Cubans did in the past. On the converse, if the "pie" is being taken away for Cubans, what does that mean for them? How do their model of success and their American Dream change in relation to the influx of the "other" Latin Americans in the city?

Nicaraguans and Haitians: A Refugee Encore

Nicaraguans and Haitians trail behind Cubans as the largest Latin American groups in the city. Both groups followed similar immigration patterns between the late 1970s and early 1990s to re-establish themselves within the city. Like the Cubans' development of Little Havana, Nicaraguans and Haitians created enclaves in the city where thousands of families and friends flocked to Little Managua and Little Haiti.

In 1988, *The Miami Herald* reported that thousands of Nicaraguans immigrants settled in Miami-Dade County, where U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) estimated a rate of three hundred Nicaraguans arriving per week. (Marquis 1988) As INS detained some of them at the Texas-Mexico border, a comparison was drawn to the detained 1980 Mariel refugees. A federal judge ruled their release and the city prepared for a "repeated performance" of survival and tension (Portes and Stepick 1994).²² Working-class Nicaraguans revitalized the informal sector as they sold flowers on the streets and worked cleaning jobs while upper and middle-class Nicaraguans settled in wealthier areas and reestablished their professional careers. Each of them worked toward a chance at the "pie" being offered to them by living in Miami. Thousands of Nicaraguans were following the footsteps of their immigrant predecessors and "pinned their hopes for a future on a new life in Miami" (Mohl, 1990; Croucher, 1997).

Cubans and Cuban Americans, many of whom were in positions of power, embraced Nicaraguans with open arms (Portes and Stepick 1994). A campaign promoted by Cubans was created to help out Nicaraguans in their time of crisis. Doctors set up examination rooms, city

aids called up restaurants to pledge food donations, news directors raised funds on their shows, and workers attempted to find job postings. Cesar Odio, a Cuban manager, bused 150 refugees to the Bobby Maduro stadium and assured reporters that they would be treated the same as the Marielitos in 1980: “Now they understand that they have the full support of the city” (Portes and Stepick, 1994). Nicaraguans were viewed by Cubans as victims of communism and referred to as “our Nicaraguan brothers” in reaction to Castro and the Sandinistas' comradery.

The shared plight between Nicaraguans and Cubans allowed the two groups to bond over their shared past to reject the government from their home countries respectively and pursue an opportunity in the U.S. In sharing that commonality, Nicaraguans were able to indirectly tap into the extensive Cuban network that had been established over time. The Cuban campaign to support Nicaraguan refugees demonstrates the massive social and cultural capital that Cubans had in Miami – a feat that would have been not possible years prior. Nicaraguans fit the "Cuban success story" model, and, to an extent, the “Cubanized American Dream” in their effort to reject socialist and communist governments. They were able to conform and meet some of the "Golden Exile" expectations by representing another compatriot willing to uphold Americanism on the international front.

Compared to Nicaraguans, Haitian immigrant groups differed in their migration patterns to the U.S. and how they were accepted and perceived by the U.S. Haitian immigrant waves to the U.S. emerged during the Duvalier dynasty in the 1970s and 1980s to find opportunities yet found themselves in similar boats as the Black community under "double subordination" where their identity operated in a liminal space between being Black and being a Caribbean immigrant

(Portes and Stepick 1994). Like the Chilean immigrants in the 1980s, Haitians differed because they were not escaping a communist government, but rather an autocratic dictatorship. INS attempted to discourage Haitians from declaring political asylum and accelerated the deportation process. They justified it by arguing that there was a difference between “political” refugees and “economic” refugees, with the former referring to escaping communist government (Portes and Stepick 1994).

While the Haitians eventually received some support, the difference in how Haitians were received compared to how other more contemporary groups, such as Cubans and Nicaraguans, were received exhibits a jarring disparity in opportunity and success in Miami. While Haitians were attempting to, as with many others, find their American Dream, the U.S. government curtailed them from doing so by creating a distinction between “political” and “economic” motivations. However, the American way of success is inherently rooted in economics, specifically how it embraces capitalism and rejects communism. By ideologically codifying the opportunity, success, and the American Dream, a standard is created to pursue opportunity in the U.S. and who is left out of that narrative, specifically how these tenets espoused by the White Cuban establishment contradicts the existence of Black immigrants like Haitians.

Although Nicaraguans' and Haitians' presence may have possibly threatened Cuban dominance early on, Cubans still maintain the majority of the city's Latin American population compared to the 113,501 Nicaraguans and 123,001 Haitians in 2012 (Arranda, Hughes, and Sabogal 2014). Based on numbers, Nicaraguans and Haitians, even combined, fail to surpass even 50% percent Miami's Cuban population. Both groups may lack the expansive network that

the Cuban community has established over the years within the city, preventing them from accessing the same opportunities. Nicaraguans had been socialized to be part of a more extensive American network rooted in tenets like the ones that White Cubans have followed.

On the other hand, Haitians had similar motives in immigrating to the U.S., but the context of their plight varied substantially. While they were escaping an authoritarian government, Haitians' rallying support did not include an invitation to the network nor welcomed into the U.S. as it had been for Cubans and Nicaraguans. In some ways, similar to the Mariel Cubans, Haitians were expected to compete for the other groups in the city and contribute to the intraethnic tension in fighting for their opportunity and success as both were racialized differently compared to White Cubans. Their chances of opportunity were reduced because they failed to meet the criteria that offered them the chance to be part of the American Dream prophesized and laid out for White Cubans. Ultimately, the difference and similarities between both groups highlight the conflicts that come with perception, especially in relation to how a group can achieve their American Dream and what factors hinder or enable it.

Latinx Americans and Immigrant Possibilities

In 2004 and 2007, two national surveys focusing on the American Dream were conducted by the National League of Cities (NLC) and Lake Research Partners (LRP) (Fraga 2010). The survey unveiled a commonality found amongst the responses of working-class Americans and Latin American immigrants: "Financial stability." While both groups may differ in racial and ethnic background, social class and the future perception are contingent on whether an individual has financial security. For many non-Cuban Latin American immigrants, they feel

similar pressures as other groups and perceive that the achievability of the American Dream is based on whether employment is available for them that will allow them to continue to be prosperous – an opportunity that may not be granted to them in their home countries.

Additionally, data from the Immigrant Transnationalism and Modes of Incorporation (ITMI) survey showcases the different causes of immigrating to the U.S. in general and specifically among Latin American immigrants (Arranda, Hughes, and Sabogal, 2014). The survey emphasizes how economics, job opportunity, and education were the top three reasons immigrants moved to the U.S.. Although appearing dissimilar, the three reasons are connected: they allow immigrants to achieve cultural capital within Miami and climb up the social and economic ladder. They contribute to the economic stability and possibility of the American Dream and, thus, work in tandem with a national ethos that continues to hold a presence in Latin American immigrants' lives. It reinforces that education and job opportunities will contribute to a newfound success that would not be found in their home countries.

The “other” Latin Americans, in an attempt to reinvent their own lives, find themselves continuously dealing with White Cuban dominance, even while attempting to acquire any possible opportunity for themselves. While Cuban numbers have decreased in proportion to the Hispanic population since 1980, they still maintain a hegemonic presence within Miami that gatekeeps outside groups. For example, Dulce, a Venezuelan immigrant in cleaning services, criticized how Cubans have benefitted the most from the U.S. and the inequity compared to other non-Cuban Latin Americans:

In social related matters, Cubans had a preference toward them. The Cubans would arrive and they [U.S. government] would give them six months, they would give them health care services, they would give them money for food, money for housing, so many resources, and then a El Salvadorian would arrive, or a Colombian would arrive, and then nothing. It was one of those things that there was discrimination, and they were the pampered ones, do you understand? They were the ones that had to receive everything and it's not right because we're all human and we all deserve the same rights....and everyone knows it. (Paredes-Ruiz 2020)

Dulce's annoyance with the inequity between Cubans and non-Cuban Latin Americans highlights the tension between Miami's different nationality groups and the consciousness of Cuban favorability: "Cubans will always pick the Cubans." In a racially conscious society, White Cubans are perceived as White, which facilitates how easily they could assimilate into U.S. culture and uphold their glorified image. Even though some groups may come from a similar background like the White Cubans in their escape from a communist government it all boils down to falling in line with how White Cubans want to continue to be perceived and what it says about the racialization behind the American Dream.

	N (000s)	HISP	MEX	PR	CUB	OTH
1980 Population Composition (%)	580	35.7	2.2	7.9	70.0	20.0
1990 Population Composition (%)	950	49.2	2.4	7.2	59.2	31.2
2000 Population Composition (%)	1,292	57.3	2.9	6.2	50.4	40.5

NOTE: N = Hispanic population absolute size (000s)
HISP = Hispanics as a percent of that city's population
MEX = % of Hispanics that are Mexican
PR = % of Hispanics that are Puerto Rican
CUB = % of Hispanics that are Cuban

OTH = % of Hispanics that are other

Table 1. Hispanic Subgroup Composition in Miami, 1980-200.

Source: Mary J. Fischer and Marta Tienda, "Redrawing Spatial Color Lines: Metropolitan Dispersal, Segregation, Economic Opportunity," in *Hispanics and the Future of America*, ed. Faith Mitchell and Marta Tienda (Washington, D.C: National Academies Press, 2006), 136-137.

Whereas some groups may fervently believe in the American Dream and its symbolism, others may think it is false or applicable to few people in the U.S. Americanism is centered on a communal ideology that unites all types of people and creates a blanketed narrative for success and opportunity. Yet, these ideas are based on the assumption of equal footing amongst people and failed to consider the intersections of race, class, and ethnicity. The mold is construed to fit a specific group in mind, similar to how White Cubans imposed their standards onto the rest of Miami.

Karina, a Colombian immigrant medical professional, came to the United to find herself better opportunities in the medical field. However, she struggled to advance because of language barriers and licensing requirements. Karina talked about how it is difficult for working professionals to immigrate to the U.S. because you are forced to re-do your entire job track. It may be too time-consuming or expensive. She voiced that the American Dream was something from another time because unemployment and poverty prevail in the U.S.. Some immigrants never get the opportunity even to get remotely close to the occupation they had in their home country. While some immigrants may believe in the American Dream, others are discouraged because of the limitations that exist for some people, forcing them to accommodate their lives and re-imagine a story that they probably once actively believed in.

While Karina does not believe in it, she recognizes the preferences and difficulties with job opportunities in the city with Cubans, similar to Dulce: "If two Latinos are going for the same job, but one is Cuban, and the interviewer is Cuban – they'll hire the Cuban because they work to help each other" (Paredes-Ruíz 2020) Karina, alongside Dulce, illustrates the struggles that non-Cuban Latin Americans face in penetrating the Cuban stronghold and its influence on the city.

Elena Sabogal utilizes "new" and "old" immigrant groups models to compare between groups and how they perceive themselves after immigrating to Miami (Sabogal 2005) "New" immigrant groups romanticize their past and struggle to accept their status once moving to the U.S., specifically how there are not as many opportunities for them as initially believed. An example is seen with Alonso, a Colombian journalist, who recognizes the loss in position and status since moving to the U.S. and must be ready to "deliver pizzas" (Sabogal 2005). Compared to the established immigrants, some immigrants do not have the same network to rely on, especially in a city dominated by Cubans, because of the time it takes to build a community. From the earliest arrivals, Cubans have been making their community for over half a century, while other groups have only arrived within the last two decades. Nevertheless, immigrant groups build off each other as areas and communities over time with each immigration wave that comes after.

Terry F. Buss and Marcela Tribble highlight this by drawing reference to Flagler Street's transformation from being dominated by Anglo and Jewish residents to "Little Havana" to the "Latin Quarter" after Cubans left for the suburbs (Buss and Tribble 2003). These new Latin American immigrant groups struggled to create that foundation and lacked a model to follow

that had welcomed them with and pushed for their American Dream. On the other hand, the established White Cubans held on to the control they had over the city to ensure their dream's longevity by supporting the newly arrived immigrant that was most like them and creating infrastructures that were ready for the continuity of this standard.

New immigrant groups may be perceived as inferior because they may fail to meet the standards of White Cubans in opportunity, success, and dreams, regardless of whether they might have similar stories and backgrounds. It may be a lack of sufficient anti-communist sentiment or desires for capitalistic success. It may come down to have subsequent groups racialized differently, especially groups who are farther away from Whiteness.

Ramona, a Dominican immigrant, addresses the intraethnic discrimination by labeling it as “Cubanismo” and drawing attention to similar conflicts brought up by Dulce on the Cuban favoritism by U.S. policies and their “positions of power as the ‘owners’ of the city.” Elizabeth Arranda makes a note of the distinction is made between different non-Cubans and Cubans and how it contributes to a larger discourse of “Hispanic-on-Hispanic” discrimination, or, in Miami’s case, “Cuban-on-non-Cuban discrimination.” Emilia, a Peruvian immigrant, builds on this by explaining how she perceives Cubans as thinking that they are different from every other non-Cuban, thus creating distance between them (Arranda, Hughes, and Sabogal, 2014).

As White Cuban and Cuban Americans continue to maintain control over the city, a hegemonic rule is placed on the city that prevents some groups from succeeding as the groups that came before them similarly. A competitive environment is meshed into Miami’s atmosphere as different groups, scattered across the city, begin a tug-of-war trying to find and

solidify their perceptions of the American Dream and home within the U.S. However, the chance to obtain that success varies each time, but it does not change that their motivation to grab on to their “piece of the pie” in transforming the city, similar to how White Cubans have done in the past.

A Dream on Edge

On November 1, 2020, an opinion article titled “Obituaries for the American Dream” was published in *The New York Times*. They start the piece by asking the following questions: “But what’s a dream anyway? A brimming over of the day’s repressed desires? Just a flutter of the Neurons?” Lizania Cruz, a Dominican artist and curator, reexamines what the “American Dream” is and what it means to people, but more importantly, did that dream ever exist? She argues that the country’s “American Dream” had lived for 89 years, but the dream had died faster for some.

Bill Stoddart, a resident from Montana, captures his feelings of discontent with American society and its values:

The American dream died for me when I realized our allegiance to the myth of rugged individualism has completely overwhelmed our willingness and ability to lift others up. It seems we have decided there is only so much pie available, so we better get what we can without realizing that in buying into a zero-sum game, we have made a bargain that not only limits our own ability to thrive but prevents others from doing so as well.

Stoddart criticizes the American Dream by pointing out a falsified narrative created to limit others yet push ourselves forward. The American Dream, or rather Americanism, operates under the guise of communal patriotism to garner unity, but interestingly enough, it exemplifies individualized competition. It exhibits the push-and-pull of American capitalism as people search to find their sweet spot of opportunity. In turn, the individualism espoused, evidently seen in heterogeneous societies like Miami, inherently pits groups against each other as some groups elevate and succeed. In contrast, others are curtailed from being able to achieve their success. The American Dream is rooted in a competition that gatekeeps opportunity, placing winners at the top while everyone must attempt to be the next winner in the game.

The “Cubanized American Dream” in Miami centers on the desires, standards, and values of White Cubans, creating a hegemonic model for subsequent Latin American immigrants in Miami to follow. It fails to consider the repercussions of obstructed opportunity for other Latin Americans. It pushes and sponsors uphold an individualistic competition amongst groups, fighting to see who has access to opportunity. Cuban dominance dictates and gatekeeps opportunity for the other groups, and thus, as Stoddart says, buy into a “zero sum game.” Other Latin Americans are forced to bargain their identity and place for a seat at the table in hopes of pursuing their own American Dream.

By giving in to Americanism, immigrant groups accept the terms and conditions that their success is based on differentiating themselves and pushing themselves forward while pushing others down, especially those racialized differently. This is evident in Miami with the Cubans and the Mariel exiles, Nicaraguans and the Haitians, and again with “established” immigrants and the “new” immigrants – there is always a power struggle amongst groups.

Damian, a Colombian immigrant, comments on this intraethnic tension: “Sometimes intolerance comes from ourselves...It is Cuba against Colombia...It is Cuba against Nicaragua...Nicaragua against Panama...If we ourselves cannot stand each other, how are going to form a united group so that the rest of the world will respect us” (Arranda, Hughes, and Sabogal 2014).

As different ethnicities and nationalities compete against each other, the prophecy of American capitalism is unleashed. They are initiated into being White ambassadors and advocates for the U.S. in their attempt to validate their experiences as Americans; however, the invitations fall flat as some groups are perceived or not validated as being part of this global struggle. A White Cuban establishment upholds these values and gatekeeps the opportunities that may be selectively granted to other groups that may fall qualify in Miami as power was transformed from one White ruling elite class to another.

The hegemonic strength of the White establishment is evident in the 2020 U.S. elections where Incumbent Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Power lost to Republican Carlos A. Giménez in getting re-elected for Florida’s 26th congressional district seat in Miami. Mucarsel-Powell was the first Ecuadorian and South American-born immigrant to serve in the U.S. Congress representing a district whose demographics were slowly changing. Carlos Giménez, on the other hand, is a Cuban-born immigrant that came to the U.S. with his family during the first wave of Cuban immigration. The unseating of a non-Cuban Latin American to a White Cuban provides a glimpse into how intraethnic tension continues to prevail in Miami as the groups push and pull for opportunities, evidenced by how Mucarsel-Powell had unseated a Cuban in the 2016 election.

As a case study, Miami exhibits how prevailing Cold War attitudes transcend borders and manifests itself in the perceptions of different actors. Ramon Grosfoguel argues that “Miami emerged as the antithesis in Communist Cuba, promoting the success of American capitalism and democracy,” aligning with the Americanism espoused by Latin American immigrants (Grosfoguel 2003) However, Miami is not only antithetical to communist Cuba, but also to any suspected communist country; it could even be seen as a surrogate country, or home instead, for Latin Americans. Whether or not they intend to be staunch anti-communist U.S. patriots, Latin American immigrants are caught in the ongoing geopolitical legacy and struggle manifested through the American Dream – a dream rooted in Whiteness.

The “American Dream” is an idea placed on a pedestal by the U.S. to garner support for the country during the Cold War It is a tool that White Cubans use to justify their legitimacy as the Golden Exiles and impose on other groups where their success was contingent on capitalism, anti-communism, and Whiteness. Its legacies are felt across all levels through statistical data, interviews, and scholarship, where the constant reimagining of what success and opportunity continues to this day. As Latin Americans left their homelands for a better tomorrow, they were attracted to the ideas of opportunity and success yet failed to understand the consequences that would come subsequently. The intraethnic and ethnoracial tensions within Miami are an effect of how the American Dream pits groups against each other as they attempt to redefine what opportunity means for them in the U.S. At the same time, they navigate their proximity to Whiteness and Americanness. Conflicts over the American Dream, success, and opportunity pose the question of whether the dream has faded for new Latin American immigrants or if its transformation reflects the continuous conflict over resources,

infrastructure, and race. The perceptions of such opportunistic ideas shift over time as they ask themselves the age-old question of their “American Dream.”

End Notes

1. The 1965 Hart-Cellar Act banned immigration quotas based on race, ethnicity, and nationality. Refugee status was only available for immigrants if they fled a “communist or communist-dominated country.”
2. W. Lloyd Warner theorized an “ethnic” as someone outside a mainstream community and considered to be “distinct” from the rest. See Michael Banton, “Ethnic Origin and Ethnicity,” in *What We Know About Race and Ethnicity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), on Warner’s theories on how ethnic differences contribute to issues in class, assimilation, and upward mobility.
3. Miami, Miami-Dade County, and Miami-Dade are used interchangeably throughout this essay, even though City of Miami is within the extensive system of municipalities within Miami-Dade County.
4. Scholars debate over the classification of Latin America because of differences in languages, colonial history, and geopolitical region. The definition varies based on individual accounts, popular media, and perception by the Global North; however, this essay focus on Latin American countries with shared Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonization outside of the Anglo-American region and located within Central America, South America, or the Caribbean.
5. Grenier argues that U.S. Cuban presence is comprised of three characteristics: the third-largest Latino community, a community of professionals and entrepreneurs, and a self-designated status as an exile community.
6. Portes and Stepick's central question of "Who Rules?" refers to Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* (1961) and applies Dahl's analysis on how political power socializes immigrants into participating in mainstream institution, allowing them to feel included.
7. Although Portes and Stepick do not refer to their methodology as a "tri-ethnic approach," they frame their analysis as such by explicitly dividing the groups into three categories: Anglo, Black, and Cuban.
8. The nomenclature surrounding Latin American identity in the U.S. is a contentious issue within academic and personal circles because of its subjectivity, origins, and linguistics differences. Latinx is a gender-neutral term that has been used to combat the gendering of the Spanish language but perceived by some to be linguistic imperialism. Hispanic is a contrived identity marker implemented by the U.S. in 1976 for U.S. Census data collection purposes that is often rejected similarly for its imperial undertones. This essay uses Latinx and Latin American interchangeably when referring to the broad ethnic and racial group. Hispanic will be used sparingly depending on source usage. (i.e., interviews, quotes, statistics)
9. Under the scope of U.S. racial constructions, Latin Americans are racialized and viewed as “not White” because they exist outside of Whiteness. White Latin Americans may still experience privilege based on White, Eurocentric features compared to Latin Americans with Black and Indigenous/Native features. The construction of Latinx identity is examined in Laura E. Gómez, *Inventing Latinos: A New Story of American Racism* (New York: The New

Press, 2020). She argues that racial and ethnic identity are not mutually exclusive and reexamines where Latin Americans fit in U.S. racial hierarchy.

10. Grenier theorizes the creation of the Cuban community in Miami in its migration waves: Political Exile (1959-1964), Social Exile Migration (1965-1973), Detent Migration (1974-1979), Promised Land Migration (1981-1989), and Transnational Migration (1990-2000).
11. *Los Gusanos*, translated as "the worms," is the term Castro used to describe Cuban emigrants after the Cuban Revolution.
12. Statistical data on how many Marielitos immigrated to the United States in 1980 may differ slightly depending on the source.
13. According to the Ethnic Composition of Metropolitan Miami table, the total Miami population in 1950 was 495,000 with 410,000, White, non-Hispanics, and 20,000 Hispanics as well as 65,000 Black. It is critical to note that there is overlap between the Hispanic and Black categorization due to Afro-Latinx/Black Hispanics.
14. "The Golden Exiles" refers to the Cubans that came after the fall of Batista in 1959 and before the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. This identity marker and status worked in tandem with the "Cuban Success Story" in praising the achievements of Cuban in fleeing Castro's communist government.
15. The position titles for both the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County are referred to as "Mayor," with the former's jurisdiction centered on the downtown area. Simultaneously, the latter has jurisdiction over the entire metropolitan area in which the City of Miami resides.
16. The only era in which the City of Miami did not have either a Cuban or Cuban American Mayor after Xavier Suarez's initial inauguration in 1985 was when Stephen T. Clark succeed him in 1993.
17. Maurice Ferré served six terms as the Mayor of the City of Miami after stepping in for David T. Kennedy in 1973, who was caught in a bribery controversy and asked to step down.
18. Francis X. Suarez is the son of Xavier Suarez, initially elected in 1985 and 1997, and Raquel Regalado is the daughter of Tomás Regalado, initially elected in 2009.
19. South American immigration rose from 1,035,062 in 1990 to 1,353,562 in 2000 – an estimated 31% increase within a decade, according to the U.S. Census in 1990 and 2000.
20. The following interviews have been conducted by the author in an oral history research study. All names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the interviewee.
21. The additional "Other Hispanic" category in 2000 was considered technically to be a majority non-Cuban Latin American group based on statistical data, but the information does not clarify who is classified as "Other Hispanic." This categorization may refer to other countries in Latin America with varying colonial histories, such as French Guiana and Belize.
22. The migration from Texas to Miami was based on a federal judge's order that lifted the immigrants' restriction to settle near the Mexican border. Many Nicaraguan exiles took the opportunity to travel over 1,000 miles to Miami where many of them had relatives and heard stories about accommodations in large stadiums.

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